

U.S. Section 100th Anniversary Conference Technical Program

Panel 2 – Comparative Assessment of Environmental Impacts

Environmental Advantages as a Factor in Prioritization of Water Transportation Projects

Joseph R. Wilson
Dredging and Navigation Branch
Operations Division
USACE

My Goals

- Take you through history – one more time
- Give you a non-economists' view of economics, environment and navigation
- Look at the future

The earliest environmental legislation

- Antiquities Act of 1906
- Fish and Wildlife Act of 1934
- Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act of 1956
- National Environmental Policy Act of 1970
- Flurry of environmental legislation in the 70's
- State regulation of Federal activities (CZMA and 401)

The changing culture of the 1970's

- Why did the environment matter?
 - Hurricanes of the late 60's
 - August 1969 Camille Gulfport, MS
 - September 1965 Betsy Miami, FL
 - On June 22, 1969 the Cuyahoga River in Ohio chocked with debris and coated with an oil slick caught fire

The changing culture of the 1970's

- What were the advantages of including environmental considerations in water transportation projects?
 - Environmental benefits benefited humans to (hunters, fisherman, recreation, water sports)
 - Economic costs for construction of environmental features also provided local economic benefits

The changing culture of the 1970's

- How was cost a factor in whether projects proceeded?
 - Projects had to meet environmental test (irreparable harm, significant impacts on the quality of the human environment, mitigation)

The changing culture of the 1970's

- Did economics fairly factor in environmental costs?
 - We were not as good then as we are now at assigning economic value to environmental features (what is the economic value of a wetland, what is fisherday worth?)

What happened in the 1980's

- Economics-economics-economics
 - Everything had a price tag
 - Cost sharing (WRDA 86)

What happened in the 1980's

- Did the environment benefit?
 - Environmental features stepped to equal status to human use economic benefits

What happened in the 1980's

- Were environmental features exceeding the costs to the detriment of water transportation?
 - In some cases yes
 - States were feeling their oats under the CZMA and CWA
 - Mitigation for fish and wildlife

What happened in the 1980's

- Were we equitably integrating the environment in project decision making?
 - Put it in WRDA!!!!!!

Balance in the 1990's??

- Cost and benefits
 - We are getting better at assigning value but not there yet.
 - Poplar Island

Balance in the 1990's??

- Trade-off analysis!
 - Somebody always loses
 - Not every project is supported by everyone
 - Let's negotiate

Balance in the 1990's??

- Ecosystem management.
 - New buzz word for our lexicon
 - But managing an ecosystem cost \$\$\$\$\$\$\$
 - What does ecosystem management get you?

Balance in the 1990's??

- Sustainable development?
 - What is this anyway?
 - Like ecosystem management but we just do it on a long term basis
 - But are we willing to look at the long term cost???????

The Next Frontier

- Endangered species!
 - Old law new species
 - More species being listed
 - Is this a natural part of evolution?
 - Or does every species deserve total protection from extinction no matter the cost?

The Next Frontier

- Exotic species (we have a national Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force)
- And a Law - Nonindigenous Aquatic Nuisance Prevention and Control Act of 1990

The Next Frontier

- Clean Air Act
- 1993 EPA Regulations
- Non-attainment areas
- Let's make some electric dredges

The Next 100 Years.

- Honing in on ecosystem management
- More cost-sharing. Those that benefit will pay more
- Renewable resources

The Next 100 Years.

- Using research better.
 - Currently our research has far outstripped our ability to use the information to make decisions

The Next 100 Years.

- Will balance prevail?
- Does U.S. need 206 deep draft harbors?